



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

Honorable Vito A. Gagliardi, Sr.
Commissioner
New Jersey State Department of Education
100 River View Plaza
P.O. Box 500
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0500

SEP 14 2001

Honorable Christine Grant
Department of Health and Senior Services
363 West State Street
P.O. Box 360
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0360

Dear Commissioner Gagliardi and Secretary Grant:

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted a review in New Jersey during the weeks of February 14, 2000 and September 25, 2000 for the purpose of assessing compliance in the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and assisting New Jersey in developing strategies to improve results for children with disabilities. OSEP also conducted a follow-up visit during the week of June 4, 2001 to specifically assess the State's compliance with the Special Conditions placed on NJSDE's FFY 1999 and FFY 2000 Part B grant awards. As a result of the follow-up visit OSEP determined that Special Conditions were no longer needed and did not impose Special Conditions on the FFY 2001 Part B grant award.

The IDEA Amendments of 1997 focus on "access to services" as well as "improving results for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities." In the same way, OSEP's Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process is designed to focus Federal, State and local resources on improved results for children with disabilities and their families through a working partnership among OSEP, the New Jersey State Department of Education (NJSDE), the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) and parents and advocates in New Jersey. In conducting its review of New Jersey, OSEP applied the standards set forth in the IDEA 97 statute and in the Part C regulations (34 CFR Part 303) and Part B regulations (34 CFR Part 300).

A critical aspect of the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process is collaboration between Steering Committees of broad-based constituencies, including representatives from NJSDE, NJDHSS and OSEP. The Steering Committees assessed the effectiveness of State systems in ensuring improved results for children with disabilities and protection of individual rights. In addition, the Steering Committees will be designing and coordinating implementation of

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Page 2 - Commissioner Gagliardi, Sr. and Commissioner Grant

concrete steps for improvement. Please see the Introduction to the Report for a more detailed description of this process in New Jersey, including representation on the Steering Committees.

OSEP's review placed a strong emphasis on those areas that are most closely associated with positive results for children with disabilities. In this review, OSEP clustered the Part B (services for children aged 3 through 21) requirements into four major areas: Parent Involvement, Free Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Environment, Secondary Transition and General Supervision. Part C (services for children aged birth through 2) requirements were clustered into five major areas: Child Find and Public Awareness, Family-Centered Systems of Services, Early Intervention Services in Natural Environments, Early Childhood Transition, and General Supervision. Components were identified by OSEP for each major area as a basis to review the State's performance through examination of State and local indicators.

The enclosed Report addresses strengths noted in New Jersey, areas that require corrective action because they represent noncompliance with the requirements of the IDEA, and technical assistance regarding improvement for best practice. Enclosed you will find an Executive Summary of the Report, an Introduction including background information, and a description of issues and findings.

The NJSDE and the NJDHSS have indicated that this Report will be shared with members of the Steering Committee, the State Interagency Coordinating Council, the State Advisory Panel, and members of the public. OSEP will work with your Steering Committees to develop corrective actions and improvement strategies to ensure improved results for children with disabilities.

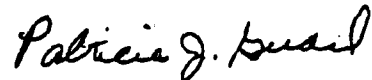
Thank you for the assistance and cooperation provided by your staffs during our review. Throughout the course of the review, Ms. Barbara Gantwerk and Ms. Terry Harrison were responsive to OSEP's requests for information. They each provided access to necessary documentation that enabled OSEP staff to work in partnership with the Steering Committee to better understand New Jersey's systems for implementing the IDEA. An extraordinary effort was made by State staff to arrange the public input process during the Validation Planning week and, as a result of their efforts, OSEP obtained information from a large number of parents (including underrepresented groups), advocates, service providers, school and agency personnel, school and agency administrators, and special education unit administrators.

Thank you for your continued efforts toward the goal of achieving better results for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities in New Jersey. Since the enactment of the IDEA and its predecessor, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, one of the basic goals of the law, ensuring that children with disabilities are not excluded from school, has largely been achieved. Today, families can have a positive vision for their child's future.

Page 3 – Commissioner Gagliardi, Sr. and Commissioner Grant

While schools and agencies have made great progress, significant challenges remain. Now that children with disabilities are receiving services, the critical issue is to place greater emphasis on attaining better results. To that end, we look forward to working with you in partnership to continue to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities.

Sincerely,



Patricia J. Guard
Acting Director
Office of Special Education Programs

Enclosures

cc: Barbara Gantwerk
Terry Harrison